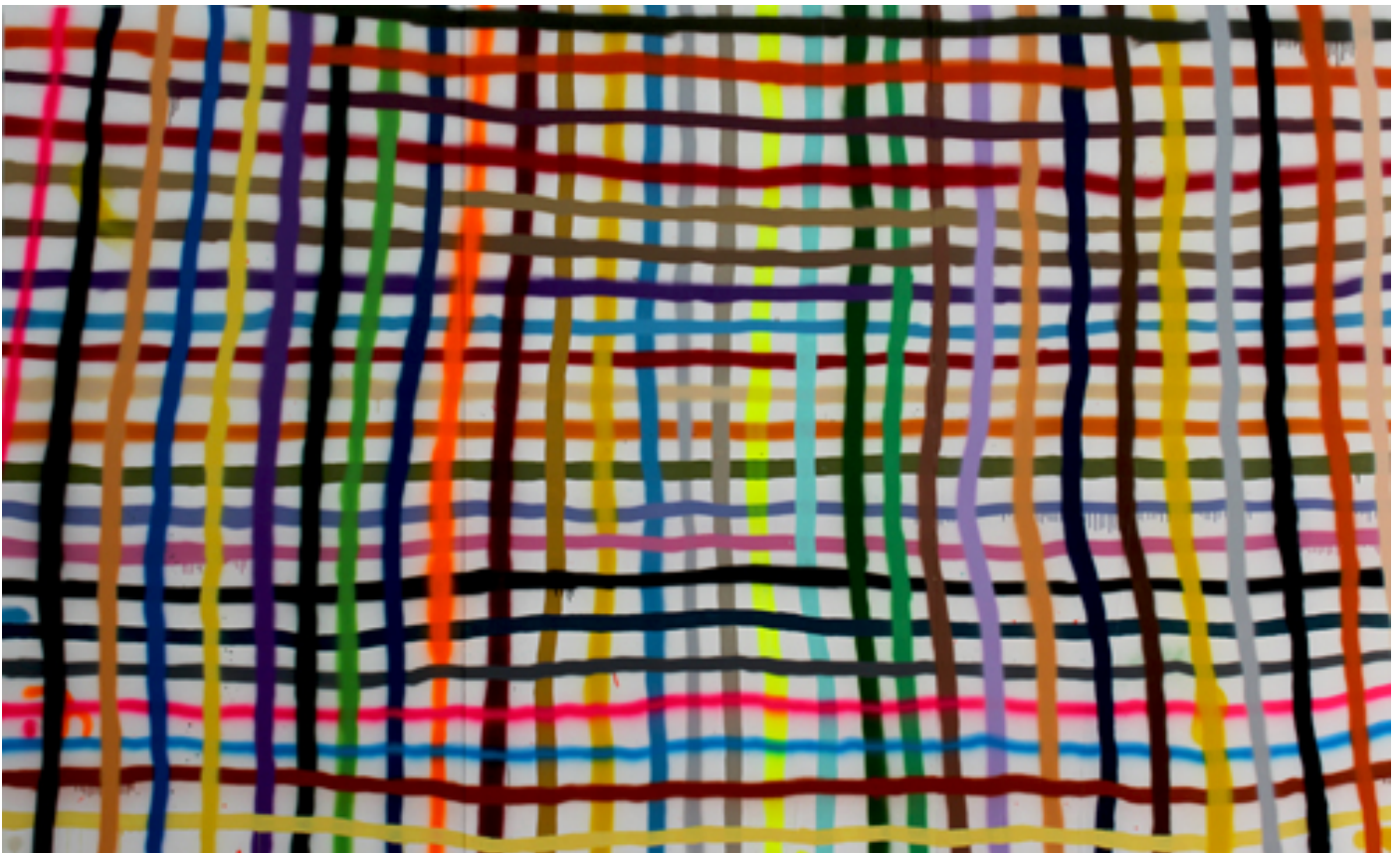


JACK HANLEY GALLERY

ARTFORUM

Alicia McCarthy
Jack Hanley Gallery



Alicia McCarthy, Untitled, 2015, spray paint and latex latex paint on wood panel, 7'4" x 10'2"

Like the San Francisco Mission artists with whom she is often grouped, Alicia McCarthy makes art from pointedly unprecious materials: latex, colored pencil, or spray paint on wood panels. This gives her works the air of handmade signs; in fact, one very large piece at her latest presentation at Jack Hanley Gallery brings to mind a billboard. And like a sign painter, she relies on a restrained visual language - color arrays, woven lines, interlocking arcs - and she marshals these decorative elements toward ends that may have little to do with decoration at all.

The billboard-size piece (all works untitled; all but one from 2015) dominated the gallery. It is an interwoven grid of bright and fluorescent spray-paint colors set against a white ground of flat, practical latex. The weave is wavy, loose, and provocatively easy to digest. The contrast of eye-catching colors against neutral ones generates a kind of movement, a feeling of being both pulled in and kept out: The grid could also be a web, a trap, a barrier. Although the work's size and light

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background evoke the immaterial - something light, all-over, directionless - a handful of places where the paint has dripped down allude to gravity and provide a playful but also defiant snub to the grid.

This sense of systems set up and then flouted echoed from work to work without being in any way elucidated, so that the regularity of the rules is tugged at by the mystery of their violation: The over-under pattern in a net hiccups obviously and unexpectedly; the right-left-right-left rhythm of multicolored overlapping lines inside a diamond shape slyly misses a beat; another weave seems to follow no pattern at all, even as each line has been laid down in a single stroke. Many of the works have a stray swoop of spray paint, suggesting the artist has vandalized (or tagged) her own works. McCarthy in person is famously reticent, but her presence seems keenly felt in these moments of abruption.

In four of the works McCarthy has staged an unlikely meeting of materials, applying colored pencil directly to latex-covered panels. In some places, the color breaks up over the paint - either the paint repelling the pencil, or perhaps, the pencil ignoring the paint. Such skirmishes provide another source of push-and-pull energy and bolster a feeling of resistance. Resistance to what? Perhaps to being pretty or precious objects, being logical, or being signs.

The sole work from 2014 is a multicolored diamond with bright colors such as grass green, lime green, pistachio green, strawberry ice-cream pink, and swimming-pool turquoise, all of which pop beautifully against plain, light-gray latex. The work's unexpected jolt comes from its having been divided into two panels, with the seam running not quite through the middle of the shape; the lines abruptly change color where they meet over this groove. The effect is spectral, migraine-ish, like a collapsing star. It suggests that while we were looking for logic, we came close to missing the real crack in vision, a flaw that contains infinite possibilities.

- *Emily Hall*

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